BC

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WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET 1983

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WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET 1983

by Patrick Stanton

In 1979 the Ministry of Labour produced two short articles which summarized the labour market activities of women (*Labour Research Bulletin*, July and August, 1979). The first examined women's participation in the work force and their experiences respecting employment and unemployment. The second article analyzed the industrial and occupational distribution of the female work force and discussed the factors which affect their levels of earning.

This article updates most of the statistical information which was presented in those earlier articles. It also takes a critical look at recent patterns of labour market involvement for women to determine what significant changes have been occurring over the past five years.

Labour Market Participation

One of the major impacts of the recent economic recession has been on the rate of female participation in the labour force. During 1983, 577,000 British Columbia women were active in the work force, a figure representing 52.4% of the working age population. However, the overall rate of participation for women did not change compared to 1982 and, in fact, was only marginally higher than 1981. It appears that the tough labour market environment has discouraged the involvement of some women in the labour force. This is likely to be a temporary break from longer term trends which have seen the female rate of participation in British Columbia double since 1961. The 1983 rate is still well above the level attained five years earlier (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
FEMALE PARTICIPATION RATE BY AGE GROUP
(%)
BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1978-1983

Age Group	1978	1982	1983
15-19	52.3	57.1	55.5
20-24	70.7	71.3	71.7
25-34	60.4	66.6	68.1
35-44	62.7	68.3	67.9
45-54	54.3	59.8	62.5
55-64	31.6	34.4	32.2
65 +	2.9	3.1	2.8
TOTAL	**48.7**	**52.4**	**52.4**

Unless otherwise noted, all data is from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Annual Averages, Cat. 71-529.

The examination of participation rates by specific age groupings shows some interesting developments over the past few years. The most rapid increases in participation over this period have been among women in the age cohorts 25-54. Although the last two years have seen a slowing of this pattern (and a slight reversal among women aged 35-44), overall, these categories have still experienced rapid increases in participation. For example, the rate for women aged 25-34 has risen from 60.4% in 1978 to 68.1% in 1983.

A key to increased participation among these age cohorts likely revolves around the changing characteristics of the family. Women are marrying later, having fewer children, and having them later in life. The result is that family responsibilities have perhaps become a less difficult barrier to labour force participation for many women. In addition, part-time employment opportunities continue to rise at a phenomenal rate (44.1% increase in the past five years) permitting a balancing of family and work responsibilities.

Among women aged 15-24, the increases in participation over the past five years have been less significant than among older women. The clear economic rewards for increased education and the already high levels of participation among women aged 20-24 (71.7% in 1983) may have been important factors. School is certainly a strong alternative to work force involvement among younger women and one that has likely gained in the preferences of individuals as unemployment levels among women have increased in the past two years.

Recent participation rate trends are shown quite clearly in Figure 1. The curve representing the proportion of each age group which is active in the work force has shown a marked shift upwards in recent years. Movement along

LABOUR FORCE DEFINITIONS

LABOUR FORCE - that portion of the civilian, non-institutional population 15 years of age and over who, during the reference week, were employed or unemployed.

EMPLOYED - all persons during the reference week who either (a) did any work for pay or profit, or (b) had a job but were absent because of illness, climate, vacation, labour disputes or personal or family responsibilty.

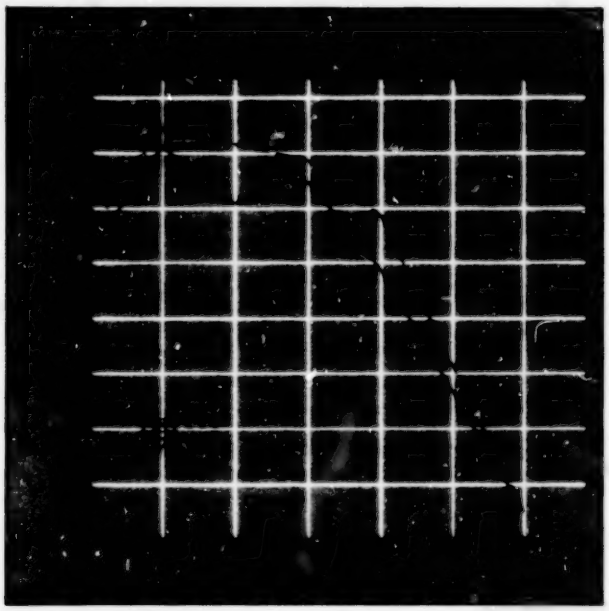
UNEMPLOYED - all persons who (a) were without work during the reference week, and had actively looked for and were available for work during the last four weeks, (b) were on layoffs for less than 26 weeks and available for work, or (c) were due to start a new job in four weeks or less, and were available for work. ((b) and (c) do not require the person to be actually looking.)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE - the number of unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force.

PARTICIPATION RATE - labour force as a percentage of the population aged 15 years or over. The participation rate for a particular group (age, sex, marital status, etc.) is the labour force in that group expressed as a percentage of the population for that group.

"Reference Week" refers to the monthly sampling of Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey.

this participation curve gives an indication, at each period in time, of the probability of a woman of a certain age being active in the labour force. Women aged 20-24 are therefore the most likely to be active while women aged 65 and over are least likely to participate.



Recent Employment Experiences

The long term pattern of increased female labour market participation has substantially altered the composition of the provincial work force. In 1983, the 577,000 women active in the labour market represented 42% of all persons active in the provincial labour force, a figure that was up from the 39% overall rate in 1979 and the 34% of 1971.

Over the past five years, the average annual growth in the female labour force has been 4.2% (although during the most recent two years the average has dipped to 2.0%). This contrasts with an annual expansion of the male work force averaging 2.1% for each of the past five years.

TABLE 2
ANNUAL GROWTH IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

	Labour Force Growth		Employment Growth	
Year	(000's)	%	(000's)	%
1979	17	3.6	17	4.0
1980	28	5.7	30	6.8
1981	39	7.6	40	8.5
1982	12	2.2	-11	-2.1
1983	10	1.8	2	0.4
5-year Average	21	4.2	16	3.5

Table 2 provides an indication of labour force and employment growth patterns for women since 1979. Although overall average employment growth for this five year period has lagged slightly behind labour force growth (3.5% each year versus 4.2%) there was a marked contrast from year-to-year. From 1979 to 1981, female employment growth equalled or exceeded female labour force growth. During the past two years, however, as an additional 22,000 women entered the work force, the total number of positions employing women was shrinking by 9,000.

TABLE 3
FEMALE EMPLOYMENT BY AGE
1983

Age Group	Number (000's)	Distribution %	Total Change from 1982 (000's)
15-19	47	9.3	-3
20-24	73	14.5	-2
25-34	146	29.0	1
35-44	113	22.5	5
45-54	78	15.5	3
55-64	40	8.0	-3
TOTAL	**503**	**100.0**	**2**

Table 3 provides an indication of the distribution of female employment in 1983 by major age cohorts. Over one-half of working women (51.5% in 1983) were in the 25-34 or 35-44 age categories. Along with the 45-54 age group, these categories were also the ages which experienced employment growth during the past year. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that these same three age groups registered expansion of total employment in 1982 (at a time when the overall level of employment among women was reduced by 11,000 positions). What appears to have occurred in 1982 is that younger (aged 15-24) and less experienced women were those most adversely affected by the employment contraction impact of the recession. Between 1981 and 1983, the number of working women aged 15-24 years declined from 142,000 to 120,000 or by 15.5%. The recession is the most significant factor in this change, although a small portion is also the result of aging among the baby boom population (the number of women aged 15-24 in the total population has dropped by 7,000 in these two years).

The accompanying Table 4 provides estimates of employment for both men and women by tenure in their current position. In each tenure category less than six years, the proportion of women is higher than of men. As a result in 1983, only 31.4% of women had been in their current position more than five years. The corresponding figure for men is 47.8%. On a more positive note, the female proportion had increased significantly since 1978 when only 26.1% of women had been in their position more than five years.

The differences in job tenure between men and women largely reflects two factors: 1) the very rapid growth in female employment means that at any point in time a relatively large number of women would have only recently entered (or re-entered) the labour force, and therefore would understandably have a relatively short job tenure; and 2) the low pay and lack of career paths in many jobs which employ women are likely to result in

TABLE 4
EMPLOYMENT BY JOB TENURE
1983

Time in Current Position	Male (000's)	%	Female (000's)	%
1- 3 months	67	9.6	55	10.9
4- 6 months	41	5.9	37	7.4
7-12 months	43	6.2	44	8.7
1- 5 years	212	30.5	208	41.4
6-10 years	135	19.5	91	18.1
11-20 years	131	18.9	54	10.7
20 + years	65	9.4	13	2.6
TOTAL	**694**	**100.0**	**503**	**99.9**

less desire to stay for any long duration in these positions.

As mentioned earlier, part-time employment is an important and growing component of total female employment in British Columbia. In fact, over the past five years, 47,000 additional part-time jobs have been filled by women. The average annual rate of increase for these jobs has been 7.5%, or over twice the expansion in all positions. This has occurred despite a slight decline in part-time positions for women between 1981 and 1982.

Women dominate the part-time job market. In 1983, women held 71.7% of all part-time positions, or 157,000 jobs. Interestingly, the propensity of women to work on a part-time basis varies significantly by age. Nearly one-quarter of all employed women aged 25-44 years worked on a part-time basis. For women aged 15-24 years, the rate of part-time employment was slightly below 40%, while among women aged 45 years and over only one-in-five worked on a reduced hours basis. By comparison, less than one in every ten males worked on a part-time basis during 1983.

An examination of the factors behind women working part-time shows that two major and contrasting reasons are commonly provided: in total, 40% of women stated in 1983 that they did not want full-time work, while an additional 32% said that they could only find part-time work; and among younger women, going to school was also a major reason for choosing to work part-time.

Industrial and Occupational Distribution

The concentration of the female work force in a limited range of industrial and occupational areas was one of the most significant features noted in our 1979 examination of women in the labour market. Although some important changes have occurred since that time, a high degree of industrial and occupational concentration remains a predominant feature of women's employment.

Table 5 provides an indication of the latest patterns of the major occupational skills of women. In 1983, women were heavily concentrated in three major occupational categories: managerial/professional/administration, clerical, and service occupations. In total, 79.0% of women in the labour force had these occupational skills. When sales occupations are added, nine out of every ten women in the province are covered by these four major groups, a proportion that is virtually unchanged from five years earlier.

Not surprisingly, the large occupational groups are also

TABLE 5
LABOUR FORCE BY
MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES
1978-1983

Position	Female Labour Force (000's) 1978	1983	Women as a Percent of Total Occupation in 1983
Managerial, Professional & Administration	110	143	45.1
Clerical	164	189	82.9
Sales	54	67	42.7
Service Occupation	96	124	55.9
Primary Occupation	11	16	18.6
Processing	21	18	11.1
Construction Trades, Transportation and Related Occupations	4	5	3.2
Material Handling and Other Crafts	7	9	17.3
Other or N.E.C.	4	6	
TOTAL	**471**	**577**	**41.5**

those which most women enter when returning or newly entering the labour force. The managerial professional administration group by itself, for example, has accounted for roughly one-third of the 106,000 increase in the female labour force over the past five years. In terms of economic impacts, the increase of women with professional and managerial skills has been a positive phenomenon since average wage returns for these skills are above that for women as a whole. Continued strong increases in female participation in the more traditional female areas of sales, clerical and service occupations have also occurred over the past five years. In contrast, the numbers of women in what is considered non-traditional skill areas for women (construction trades, processing, transportation, etc.) have increased by a much smaller amount when compared to 1978 levels.

One factor in this pattern has certainly been the impact of the recent recession which has set back employment opportunities in primary and secondary industries. The following sampling of female membership in B.C. unions, for example, shows a sharp drop in many cases from 1982 to 1983.

Union	Female Membership 1982	1983
IWA (Woodworkers)	2,632	1,963
Carpenters	529	454
Machinists	755	694
Steelworkers	1,034	707
Letter Carriers	555	613
Teamsters	1,988	1,845
IBEW (Electrical Workers)	443	324
Labourers	373	375

This overall result is not that surprising, however, as layoff by reverse order of seniority is a common feature of collective agreements and many of the gains that women

made in these non-traditional areas have occurred fairly recently.

TABLE 6
EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY AND SEX
BRITISH COLUMBIA - 1983

Occupation	Female Employment (000's)	%	Male Employment (000's)	%
Agriculture	13	2.6	20	2.9
Other Primary Industries	7	1.4	46	6.6
Manufacturing	28	5.6	123	17.7
Construction	8	1.6	62	8.9
Transportation, Communication & Other Utilities	33	6.6	91	13.1
Trade	97	19.3	114	16.4
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	41	8.2	33	4.8
Service	246	48.9	155	22.3
Public Administration	30	6.0	51	7.3
TOTAL	**503**	**100.2**	**694**	**100**

Table 6 provides estimates of employment by industry for both female and male workers during 1983. This information shows a heavy concentration of women in the tertiary sector of the economy, especially in Services (community, business and personal) which accounted for nearly one-half of the 503,000 women employed during the year. Second to Service was the Trade sector which employed 97,000 women (or 19.3% of the total) and Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate which employed a further 41,000 women.

As can be seen, the industrial distributions of employment are markedly different for women and men. Men outnumber women in all the primary and secondary industries. Overall, 89,000 women are employed in these sectors (17.8% of the female total), a number which is only one-quarter that of male employment. Although increasing numbers of women are working in non-traditional areas, the fact remains that most continue to find employment in traditional female areas. The 1981 census data on the construction industry illustrates this point. It provides information on detailed occupations for major industries and shows that of the 10,405 women recorded as working in the construction industry, a full two-thirds were engaged in clerical and related work. In fact, only 1,460 women, or 14.0% of the total were in construction trade occupations.

Income and Earnings

Industrial and occupational information is of great interest because it is a significant variable affecting wage differentials between the sexes. The occupational skills or industry of employment, however, are not the only important factors. Other variables often cited are:

1. Differences in the average number of hours worked per week or the number of weeks worked each year.
2. Differences in educational attainment.
3. Differences in work experiences or in work histories.
4. The attitudes of women about themselves.
5. The attitudes of employers towards women.

A fairly detailed discussion of these factors was included in the 1979 article cited earlier and will not be repeated here.

TABLE 7
AVERAGE INCOME FOR B.C.
FOR PERSONS DURING 1980
BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOLING

Level of Schooling	Male Number	Male $	Female Number	Female $
Less than Grade 9	138,935	14,299	140,725	6,401
Grades 9-13 (without secondary certificate)	315,640	15,547	354,025	7,188
Grades 9-13 (with certificate)	103,250	17,809	148,800	8,841
Trades Certificate or non-university diploma	276,995	20,590	252,395	9,819
Some University	110,440	19,455	110,740	10,313
University Degree	105,665	29,437	68,125	15,124
TOTAL	**1,050,920**	**18,875**	**1,074,820**	**8,020**

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 1981 Census, Cat. 92-928

Tables 7 and 8 provide some comparative information on average income for females and males by various different characteristics. Table 7 compares average income by sex for all B.C. adults during 1980 by the highest level of education attained. Table 8 examines income from employment by major occupational category for those individuals who worked full-time for the full-year 1980. Interpretation of the results of this information should be done with care since none of the data totally take into account all the factors outlined earlier.

Table 7 shows the high economic rewards that are available to women with higher levels of education — average income increases directly with education level. Among women, the average income for women with less than Grade 9 educational level was $6,401 in 1980. This figure increased to $9,819 for women who had achieved a trades certificate or a non-university diploma and was highest ($15,124 on average) for the 68,125 women who had a university degree. A similar pattern of increased income was evident for males as well, except that for this group a trades certificate provided a higher income reward than did having only some university (i.e. $20,590 versus $19,455).

Table 8 examines income from employment by major occupational category for individuals who worked full-time for the full-year. These data probably do provide a better indicator of the relative positions of males and females since it does consider some of the other factors influencing income (i.e. hours worked). Overall, the data show that a male worker in British Columbia who worked full-time for the full-year earned an average of $23,850 during 1980. Female workers who worked full-time for the full-year, by comparison, earned an average of $14,723, or 62% of the male level. This latter proportion has shown some improvement compared to 1971 when female earnings for this group of workers were 58% of the average male rate.

As shown in Table 8, the level of female earnings and its relationship to male rates in broad occupational categories can differ significantly. Women employed in

TABLE 8
AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT INCOME IN B.C. BY MAJOR OCCUPATION (FULL-TIME, FULL-YEAR, 1980)

Occupation	Male	Female	Female Rate as Percent of Male 1980	1970
Managerial	32,434	18,747	57.8	48.9
Natural Science, Engineering and Mathematics	27,433	18,978	69.2	65.4
Social Science and Related	31,773	17,757	55.9	59.3
Teaching and Related	26,894	20,201	75.1	74.4
Medicine and Health	37,323	18,132	48.6	40.2
Clerical and Related	19,557	13,727	70.2	65.1
Sales	24,501	13,931	56.9	50.3
Service	18,602	11,157	60.0	53.3
Processing	22,339	14,839	66.4	61.9
Machinery and Related	22,442	16,260	72.5	N.A.
Product Fabrication	21,842	11,639	53.3	52.6
Construction Trades	22,359	16,074	71.9	N.A.
Transportation Equipment Operators	23,236	14,159	60.9	55.2
ALL OCCUPATIONS	**23,850**	**14,723**	**61.7**	**57.6**

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 1981 Census, Special tabulation based on the 1971 occupational classifications.

N.A. - Not Available.

the teaching profession had the highest female annual earnings in B.C., averaging $20,201 during 1980 — a figure 37% higher than the all-occupation average. At the other end of the scale, women working full-time in service occupations ($11,157), product fabrication ($11,639) and clerical positions (averaging $13,727 in 1980) all received below average incomes.

Another interesting feature of Table 8 is the large variation in the male/female differentials (remembering that the figures only include full-time/full-year workers). The extremes vary from teaching and related occupations where women on an average earned three-quarters of the male rate, to medicine and health where male wages were over twice those of women.

For the most part, this variation reflects differences in the distribution of individuals among sub-occupational groups within these broader occupational categories. The medicine and health occupations provide an illustration. For males, 41% of total employment in the major group was represented by doctors and dentists whose average employment income was $56,328 in 1980, a fact which substantially raised the overall average. By contrast, only 2.1% of women in this broad medicine and health occupational group were employed as doctors and dentists. In total, 76% of women were employed in the nursing and related sub-group (whose average income in 1980 was $17,937).

This article updates much of the statistical information which is available on the labour market involvement of women in British Columbia. The data do not answer all the questions that might be asked but represents what is currently available. The information shows an increased rate of participation and employment of women in British Columbia. Over the past five years women have been entering the work force at nearly twice the rate of men. In 1983, 52.4% of all women of working age were active in the labour market, a rate which is expected to continue to gradually increase.

Despite rapid changes to both participation and employment, women still remain concentrated in a limited range of occupational and industrial sectors. Furthermore, these sectors still provide most new positions where women find employment. The evidence shows that the penetration of women into non-traditional areas is still not significant although their increased representation in managerial and professional areas can be seen as a positive trend. The other major area where only limited improvement has been registered is the area of wages, salaries and income. Significant differentials still exist between female and male workers. During 1980, a woman who worked full-time for the full-year earned roughly 62% of that earned by a man.

In conclusion, women are playing an increasingly important role in the labour market of this province. In 1983, four out of every ten workers were female and this proportion is increasing each year. Recognition of these facts requires a continued concerted effort to overcome labour market segregation and the lower incomes of female workers.